Memorandum of Understanding: A Working Partnership for Colorado Children and Families

Colorado Department of Human Services
Colorado Department of Education
Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Colorado



Our Premise: A seamless system of support from birth through third grade is necessary to support school readiness and success.

Colorado is a prosperous state and a great place to raise a family. But Colorado families do face challenges: more than 17 percent of children live in poverty and one in five third graders (22%) are English language learners. These challenges can impact optimal child development and academic success. In fact, while 91 percent of Colorado third graders fluent in English are at or above grade level in literacy, less than half (48%) with Limited English Proficiency read at grade level. Furthermore, of 3rd grade children in poverty (those eligible for free/reduced lunch) 43% read below grade level.

Through this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor are taking steps to build on Colorado's history as a national model of interagency coordination and collaboration in order to provide better developmental and academic outcomes for all children. For twenty years, the Colorado Department of Human Services and Colorado Department of Education have had a collaborative relationship codified through an interagency agreement for shared services to families and young children. The purpose of establishing this MOU is to articulate how to build on and elevate our work together related to: (1) early learning, (2) family support and parent education, (3) social, emotional, and mental health, and (4) health to establish a "common vision and commitment to advancing school readiness" (Confronting the Quiet Crisis: How Chief State School Officers Are Advancing Quality Early Childhood Opportunities, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012, p. 58).

It is incumbent upon Colorado's state agencies that support young children and families to ensure programs and services are coordinated and focused on the Colorado Early Childhood Framework vision of "All children are valued, healthy and thriving." The recommendations articulated within this document are informed by the Framework. Overall, we seek to improve our state early childhood system through a unified approach to the building blocks of strong child development and academic achievement: common early learning and development standards, developmentally appropriate assessment, comprehensive professional development, and relevant data to support continuous quality improvement at the local and state level. All elements will contribute to an aligned and integrated early childhood system and improved child outcomes.

The evidence is clear: children develop most optimally when they experience strong, nurturing relationships with parents and other caregivers and when their daily lives are filled with rich learning environments experiences at home, in care and education settings, and in their communities. When children have these experiences in their early years the likelihood they will be

on track for success throughout their school years and beyond increases exponentially. Making sure that all children have access to the supports they need in order to become healthy, thriving, successful individuals requires the responsible adults, schools, communities and agencies in their lives to come together and agree on how they will collaborate to create a seamless, coordinated early childhood system of services and supports.

Such a focus on a system of supports also makes economic sense. Nobel Prize winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman has proven that investment in early childhood supports saves money and results in better outcomes for children. He summarized his findings in *The Heckman Equation*. As stated in the Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission report, "Better outcomes for children result when health, education, and human service systems are better coordinated,

The Heckman Equation

Invest in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development

- + **Develop** cognitive skills and social skills in children early
- + Sustain early development with effective education through adulthood
- = Gain more capable, productive and valuable citizens that pay dividends to America for generations to come.

Schools, Skills, and Synapses, a presentation by James
Heckmahttp://www.heckmanequation.or
g/content/resource/presenting-heckmanequation

increasing the effectiveness, efficiency and availability of services" (2012 Annual Report of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, p. 2).

The Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Education and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Colorado are committed to capitalizing on the leadership, expertise, and resources unique to each agency in order to improve outcomes for all children. We recognize that the foundation for success in school and in life is built during the crucial developmental period between birth and age eight. Goals and objectives have been developed to guide the joint efforts and to help all stakeholders better understand the partnership and the roles of each agency.

Our Shared Early Childhood Goals

Together we will:

- Provide families with information about healthy development and proven strategies for supporting their child's developmental and academic progress.
- Ensure all families and early childhood professionals have access to necessary supports so that all Colorado children are reading by third grade.
- Provide a coordinated system of early identification of children who may be at risk of not achieving developmental or academic outcomes or who may have developmental disabilities.

- Increase access to quality early learning experiences for all children birth to age eight, especially for those most at-risk.
- Prepare early care and education providers to effectively support the developmental and academic needs and progress of all children.
- With other state partners, build a purposefully connected and coordinated system of early childhood services and programs that includes (1) early learning, (2) family support and parent education, (3) social, emotional, and mental health, and (4) health for children and families in need.
- Support continuous quality improvement activities in our programs and service models including the use of data to drive decision-making.
- Intentionally identify and seek out additional resources and partnerships that have the potential to support the early childhood system's work.

Objectives:

- Strengthen the bridge between CDE, DHS, and the Lieutenant Governor's Office to support of the ongoing development for children and families.
- Jointly leverage existing and potential resources to better serve the families and children of Colorado.
- Build and maintain an early childhood system that advances continuous, outcomesbased improvement of programs and services that increase the likelihood of school readiness and early academic success by supporting:
 - o the use of data from a variety of sources to inform decision making;
 - early identification of children who may need additional supports and services;
 - o the implementation of birth-grade 3 early learning and development guidelines that are aligned to the P-20 educational system;
 - a unified system of continuous improvement through tiered quality ratings and school and district performance frameworks supporting all early learning programs; and
 - o ongoing authentic child assessment.
- Establish a coherent and aligned system of professional career ladders for early childhood providers and educators centered on research-based practices for young children.
- Ensure that pre-service training and ongoing professional development prepares early childhood educators to advance early development and learning including social and emotional, language and literacy, mathematics and science skills of young children.
- Develop and communicate foundational literacy guidelines and use research-based strategies in support of the literacy development of children through grade 3.
- Articulate a coordinated and collaborative system of supports among the CDHS, CDE, and the Lt. Governor's Office to achieve quality outcomes for families and children.
- Ensure effective and ongoing collaboration with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and other state and local partners.

Deliverables for 2012-2013

- A written plan for rolling out articulated learning and developmental guidelines for birth through grade 3 as well as resources to help families and early educators use them appropriately and effectively
- A framework for early childhood assessment to guide the implementation of school readiness assessments in preschool and Kindergarten pursuant to SB 08-212
- Identified strategies for leveraging current agency programs for improving literacy achievement included in the Colorado Department of Education Strategic Literacy Plan
- A written framework for how the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education early childhood professional development activities will be carried out, including:
 - How activities will be aligned with initiatives and recommendations from the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, including the Early Childhood Professional Development Task Force
 - A plan for continued implementation of the Expanding Quality in Infant Toddler Care (EQ) Initiative
 - o Support of the 4-year Early Childhood Education bachelor's degree
 - Support for the continued development of the Early Childhood Professional credentialing system
 - Alignment of professional development activities with the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
 - o Inclusion of professional development opportunities for early childhood special education and related service providers
- A shared state-wide plan for implementation of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund
- An interagency agreement that formalizes the working relationship between the two
 agencies
- A joint report to respective boards
- Identified opportunities for collaboratively developed project budgets
- A communication plan for relaying the details, goals, roles and vision for this agreement
- A dedicated liaison to facilitate communication and collaboration between CDE, CDHS, and the Lt. Governor's Office

Role of Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

Office of Early Learning and School Readiness

The primary role of CDE in this MOU is to support early development and learning of young children so that they are on track for success in school and beyond. CDE will:

Support the development of an effective, efficient, early childhood system in Colorado.

- Articulate and support the implementation of comprehensive academic standards that reflect current research and widely-held age expectations.
- Implement professional development that supports the alignment of Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines and Colorado Academic Standards for teachers and providers serving children from birth grade 3.
- Develop a system of assessment that supports school readiness of all state education funded preschoolers and kindergarteners pursuant to the Preschool to Postsecondary Alignment Act (Senate Bill 08-212).
- Continue to advance the implementation of high quality preschool programming for children identified as at risk and effective services and supports for preschoolers with disabilities.
- Coordinate, through its Child Find mandate, a system for the early identification of children who may be at risk or have developmental delays or disabilities.
- Continue to advance the implementation of ongoing assessment and outcomes measurement and reporting through Results Matter.
- Participate in the collaborative development and implementation of a professional development system that ensures early childhood professionals work effectively with children and their families.

Role of the Colorado Department of Human Services

Office of Early Childhood

The primary role of CDHS in this MOU is to achieve optimal outcomes for children and families through the delivery of effective, efficient, and elegant state and local level programs and services. CDHS will:

- Support the development of an effective, efficient, early childhood system in Colorado.
- Collaborate with multiple state and local stakeholders in the continued growth and development of Colorado's Early Childhood Councils.
- Maintain and grow partnerships across all early childhood domains to develop meaningful programs and practices to enhance children's social and emotional development.
- Continue to partner with stakeholders to ensure young children, their families and caregivers are effectively engaged in practices that promote healthy growth and development.
- Provide ongoing support for, and participation in, the collaborative development and implementation of an effective and highly utilized professional development system for early childhood professionals.
- Manage and oversee a child care subsidy program for low-income and working families.

Role of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor

- Support the development of an effective, efficient, early childhood system in Colorado.
- Promote statewide the Early Childhood Colorado Framework.
- Support efforts to enhance early childhood system collaboration and coordination across state agencies and programs, including Head Start.
- Facilitate the development and implementation of core elements of the early childhood system including early learning and development guidelines and the development of core workforce competencies for early childhood professionals.
- Spearhead Colorado's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund Round 2 grant application.
- Evaluate barriers to coordination and collaboration and engage the executive branch on relevant legislative action.
- Provide leadership on the implementation of Colorado Reads: Early Literacy Initiative, including efforts to expand access to quality early learning programs for those children most at-risk.

Collaboration with Other State Agencies and Entities

Assuring that all children are on track for success in school and in life requires a coordinated, effective, and efficient early childhood system. When local and state agencies work together, services and supports can be aligned, redundancies eliminated, gaps discovered, resources leveraged and common goals reached. It is crucial, therefore, that the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Education, and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor work in partnership with other state entities that support families and children such as the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Finance, the Head Start State Collaboration Director, and the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, the Early Childhood State Partners Network, and the Early Childhood Councils Leadership Alliance.

Signatures

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